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Alcohol-Impaired Driving in Colorado, Part I of II

One of the most well-publicized and potentially costly consequences of alcohol misuse and abuse is impaired driving. With over 30,000 motorists in the state arrested each year for alcohol-impaired driving, it is an issue with significant impacts and costs to the individual offender, victims of alcohol-related crashes, and the public. This issue of ODS+ENDS is the first in a two-part series examining the prevalence, consequences, and prevention of acts of impaired driving.

Consuming even small amounts of alcohol can affect your ability to operate a vehicle.

- For the purposes of this ODS+ENDS, alcohol-impaired driving is defined as operating a vehicle after any consumption of alcohol. Even with a blood alcohol content (BAC) under the legal limit to drive, an individual may feel effects of alcohol and suffer from impaired judgment. Therefore, it is always safest to designate a sober driver to get home safely.
- The legal consequences of alcohol-impaired driving will depend on your age, license class (commercial versus non-commercial), previous charges, and BAC.
 - In general, for adults with non-commercial licenses, a BAC of just .05 can result in a Driving While Ability Impaired (DWAI) charge, and a BAC of .08 can result in a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) charge.
 - For drivers under the age of 21, a BAC of only .02 can result in an impaired driving arrest.

Alcohol-impaired driving killed nearly 12,000 people in 2008 in the US. That's one person every 45 minutes. That makes it everyone's problem.

- In 2008, over 31% of fatal car crashes in Colorado involved an alcohol-impaired driver.
- Colorado was one of only seven states to show an increase in the alcohol-impaired driving fatality rate from 2007 to 2008.
- On average, a first time drunk driving offender has driven under the influence of alcohol 87 times before being arrested.
- Although alcohol is illegal to consume for those under 21, the alcohol-impaired driving fatality rate is relatively similar between the under 21 and the 21 and over population.
- While many factors may contribute to an alcohol-related fatality (including speeding, in-vehicle distractions, and a delayed reaction time), the lack of seatbelt usage is a significant factor in the fatality rate. In fact, 75% of young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in 2007 were unrestrained at the time of the crash.

A DUI/DWAI charge is expensive and impactful to the offender as well as friends, families, and employers.

- Even for a first-time offender, a DUI charge will cost an estimated \$10,000 including charges for attorneys, treatment evaluation, and license reinstatement, as well as increased insurance premiums.
- Most DUI convictions lead to a loss of personal freedom and time because an offender can lose his license or be ordered to place an ignition interlock device on his vehicle, be imprisoned, be placed on probation, be required to complete community service hours, and/or be required to attend alcohol education or treatment for anywhere between two days and ten months.
- Others are affected when the offender becomes dependent on friends and family for rides or misses work to attend court or other mandatory appointments.

Treatment is effective in reducing the recidivism rates among DUI/DWAI offenders.

- Of the 27,255 current DUI/DWAI (Driving Under the Influence/Driving While Ability Impaired) offenders in the state, 39% have had at least one prior impaired driving offense.
- Research conducted in 2008 by the state Department of Human Services found that those individuals ordered to treatment, but not completing it, were 44% more likely to be re-arrested than those completing treatment.
- The state now offers classes specifically for those under the age of 21 charged with a DUI to better address the unique needs of underage offenders.

For more information on the dangers of alcohol-impaired driving and tips for keeping you, your friends, and your family safe, check out the following websites:

www.stopimpaireddriving.org

www.madd.org

www.friendsdrivesober.org

Stay tuned for April's edition of ODS+ENDS, with tips on preventing DUIs among family and friends.

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